

April 4, 2022

Testimony on SB 956
Criminal Law – Threats to Public Officials
Judiciary

Position: Favorable with Amendments

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 956 which would provide health officers and other public employees with further legal protection from threats made against them, which have unfortunately risen sharply in number and severity in recent years. While we are absolutely in favor of more protections for public health officials, we believe it would be a mistake to omit election officials from this legislation.

Election officials are the unsung heroes of election season. They work long hours, are often the only contact the Election Office will have with the general public during voting hours and are generally responsible for the safe and secure administration of voting procedures at each precinct. Without the participation of these trained volunteers, it would be impossible for us to conduct elections.

However, across the country and in Maryland specifically, election officials are choosing not to return to their positions in part because of threats made against them and their families. As the Maryland Association of Election Officials noted in their written testimony, in the previous election cycle it was not uncommon for election officials to receive angry and threatening phone calls and mail correspondence from frustrated voters. These credible threats against election officials not only serve as a disruption to the safe and secure administration of our elections, but also upend volunteers' personal lives and cause undue stress to them and their families.

Enhanced legal protections for election administrators will ensure that their critical work is uninterrupted and that those who seek to make threats against them are met with appropriate consequences. It will also send a clear message to the public that our election workers are worthy of the same protections as other government officials.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report and hope that the committee will take our amendment into consideration.